

Why to Rejoice when They Persecute You, Part 1

Luke 6:22-23

Let's begin as we've been doing by reading those beatitudes again together, starting in verse 20, "'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward in heaven is great; for so their fathers did to the prophets."

I covered this briefly last time, but notice at the end of verse 22, the persecution for which we're counted blessed it's not our own bad behavior. It's not our own stupidity. It's not our own mistakes or dumb actions. It's not our own sin. None of that earns us this beatitude of blessed. What it says there, persecution for which we're counted blessed, is on account of the Son of Man; on account of him. When we live like him. When we pursue fidelity to his Word. When we try to walk as he

walked. When we follow his example. When we love him, when we worship him, persecution is going to come. Count on it.

We don't go looking for persecution, we don't have to. It just comes to us. All because of him. The more we resemble the Son of Man, the more we think like him, the more we speak like him, behave like him, walk as he walked, the more we're going to experience the rejection of the world. Again that's just what Jesus told us, John 15:18-20 he said "If they hated me, they will hate you too."

But and this is what we need to see beloved. Fear not. Do not fear what they say. Do not fear their persecution. Do not fear their hatred. Because when those kinds of persecution come to you on account of the Son of Man, as it says here "Blessed are you." To fear in the face of that pronouncement of our Lord. That ascription of blessedness, listen that's, that's not good. It's almost spurning his gift, his pronouncement. And this is where we left off last time.

We were just broaching the joyful spirit of verse 23, where Jesus tells his poor, hungry, weeping, persecuted

disciples, look, rejoice in that day, leap for joy. That is to say, when that day comes, when you are hated and excluded and reviled and spurned as evil, and it will come, you're to rejoice and leap for joy when that day comes. Again, as we said last time, rejoice, leap for joy, those two verbs, those are commands. They're not recommendations. They're not suggestions. Those are actually aorist imperatives, very very strong commands. Which are commanding our obedience with a sense of urgency.

You might think of it this way, rejoice immediately when you face persecution. Jump right up where you are and leap for joy, don't hesitate for a second. You might say it this way, oppositely, do not bemoan your station if you are persecuted. Don't put on the gloomy face, moping about in dread agony, acting like some kind of potential martyr all the time. Oh well, you know, they, they said I was one of those dumb Christians. Trying to evoke sympathy or something like that. Don't, don't do that.

Don't even feel sad. When you're despised by the world don't groan and say, woe is me. That's completely the wrong

attitude, the wrong response to persecution, rather rejoice. Leap for joy, why? Because you've been counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. Think about that. He suffered for you. To enter into that suffering, isn't that a blessing? Now beloved I realize that's not a natural response. It's not the first impulse of our flesh to skip around gleefully when people despise us and curse the day we were born. That doesn't feel good to receive that kind of persecution. It's not natural to respond that way, but that is precisely the point here.

This is not a natural response; this is a supernatural response. This is a spiritually minded response. Responding to persecution like this, that is with rejoicing in obedience to Christ's command. That is a response that can only be generated by the Holy Spirit. Look, he's the power at work within those who are born again. And it's only by the Holy Spirit that one is regenerated in the first place to become the poor and the hungry and the weeping, right?

So if you're numbered among those when persecution comes then God is also going to give you the grace to rejoice as Christ has commanded you to do in the midst of persecution. Your

rejoicing will come by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now with that in mind knowing our natural proclivity to respond poorly to persecution. Knowing that persecution is coming for the sake of Christ, what I'd like to do is to give you some encouragements to rejoice when persecuted.

So let's make a list, okay? Ten reasons to rejoice when persecuted. We've noted here in verse 23, that Christ is commanding us to rejoice. And then he follows it up with two reasons to rejoice. But there's more to see in verse 22, that I'd like to call your attention to.

Okay, so first point: Rejoice because you are the blessed of Christ. Rejoice because you are the blessed of Christ. The word, *makarios*, in the Greek means, to be blessed, to be blessed; to be considered or counted as favored. In fact, there's a sense in which those who are the blessed, the *makarios*, they are even envied by others for being so well favored, so well positioned, so favorably situated. That's what it means to be blessed, to be *makarios*. Look at verse 22 and then we're going to look at verse 26.

"Blessed are you," in verse 22, "when people hate you, when

they exclude you, revile you, spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man.” And then look at the opposite at verse 26, “woe to you when all people speak well of you.” That should actually be, beloved, a warning to you. If everybody likes you in your life, that should cause you to pause; to take a careful look at your life. Take a careful look at your testimony. Are you really liked by everybody?

“Woe to you when all people speak well of you for so their fathers did to the false prophets.” Let me ask you a very basic, primary, fundamental question. Those two verses there, verses 22,26, do you believe that? Do you believe that? Because if you do, if you believe those verses, you know what, that’s remarkable. Don’t take it for granted. Because to the naturally, carnally, minded man, it is utterly counterintuitive to believe what Jesus says here, because this is completely opposite of what the rest of the world believes. So, if you truly believe those verses, you’re in. You’re in!

You belong to him. Listen all those beatitudes they require us to deal with this fundamental issue of faith. Do I believe Jesus? Do I trust him? Do I live this way or not? These verses force us to reckon with our hearts. To reckon with our belief

system, our worldview, what is, who it is, that we are going to trust. Do we trust the words, the testimony, the worldview of Jesus Christ, or do we distrust him on this point or that point. That's really the question.

If you believe him on this point, on all these points, in everything he said, then you are counted among the blessed. Yes, you'll draw fire from the world. Yes, you will incur their wrath, you'll be salt in their wound, the provocation of their guilty souls. It's going to result in persecution. They will hate, exclude, revile, spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. But, when that happens, let me remind you beloved that you have been counted among the poor.

Among those who truly hunger for God and God alone. Those who weep over sin. That means you are also counted among the blessed of Christ, you belong to him. You believe in him and that is remarkable, that means you possess saving faith; given to you by God, you're counted righteous in Christ. This is proof positive evidence you've been born again. That's a great reason to rejoice, we could preach a whole sermon on that. Amen?

That brings us immediately to a second reason to rejoice when persecuted. Rejoice, number two: because you are resembling Christ. Rejoice because you are resembling Christ. We're the poor, verse 20, which means we are in present possession of the kingdom of God. We can also say that the kingdom of God has a significant claim on us too, right?

The kingdom is ours, which means we belong to the kingdom, Christ is our king. And that means we are Christ's subjects. Paul said in Colossians 1:13, that we are those who have been delivered "from the domain of darkness and transferred out of that and into the kingdom of God's beloved Son." So in possession of the kingdom, you know what, the kingdom and its king is also in possession of us. That's a blessing. Our king, the Lord Jesus Christ, he is no ordinary earthly king.

Colossians 2:9-10 tells us that, "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." In other words, as subjects of Christ's kingdom, unlike any king in any part of the world, anywhere that there is a king, anybody who is in charge, this is different. For this king, we're united with this king, we're spiritually one with him. There's a spiritual mystery here.



We're united with him and he pours into us the very fullness of the deity, he wants us to be like him. This is rich with eternal glory. Paul sums that up with the statement in Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," a great mystery. Christ our king is intent on making all of his subjects conform to his perfect image. Which, as Colossians 2:9 tells us, "is the fullness of deity bodily."

What is this? He is filling us with the very fullness of deity. Which dwells perfectly in him. And he intends to perfect that image in us. Yes, there is still a creator-creature distinction. Yes, he is God, we are not, we are humans. We're finite, he is infinite. But there is some way in which we are becoming filled with the very fullness of God.

Ephesians 4:13, we are maturing "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." That's incredible. How does that happen? By the Holy Spirit whom Christ sent to live in us. 2 Corinthians 1:22 says that "he has also put his seal on us and given His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." That Holy Spirit, from the very beginning of Scripture, in Genesis 1, that Spirit is moving. That Spirit is active, energetic, powerful.

He does not remain stagnant. The Holy Spirit does not come in to us and then go to sleep. He's not dormant, he does not leave us unchanged. He is working within us all the time, both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. His energy and power is at work within us to change us, to conform us to the image of Christ. And we see, like in Galatians 5:22-23, that the fruit of the Spirit, that is, when the Spirit is there, there is fruit produced.

You cannot have a Christian with no fruit. When the Spirit is there and present there is a fruit growing and it is this, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Do you know what those qualities are? Not a picture of perfect virtue, but you know what they are essentially? They're really a picture of the perfections of Jesus Christ. That's what Galatians 5:22 is, Christ.

The fruit of the Spirit, the effectual nature of his presence and his power is to make us look like that. To look like Jesus Christ, who is always loving, always joyful, always peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self-controlled. And that is what the Holy Spirit produces in us:

The life, the character, the virtue of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So, when you're persecuted on account of Christ rejoice! Because they're seeing something of him in you. Which they hate, but they're seeing something of him in you. Rejoice because you're resembling Christ to such a degree that the world hates you.

Again this rejoicing and leaping for joy, this is not self-produced. This is a spirit wrought response, causing us to rejoice as Christ did also in the face of violent hostility and persecution. Hebrews 12:2 says, "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame." And on it goes. The Holy Spirit that causes us to resemble Christ, brings the world's hatred and persecution upon us all, for his name's sake. But by that same Spirit, Christ intends to produce that same joy in us as well. That's the second reason to rejoice because we're resembling Christ.

Okay, rejoice because we are counted among the blessed by faith. We rejoice because we more closely resemble Jesus Christ. The more you resemble Jesus Christ the more you're going to draw enemy fire. Here's a third reason, verse 22, we can rejoice:

Rejoice because you're condemned by Christ's enemies. Rejoice, number three, because you are condemned by Christ's enemies.

Now this may be counter intuitive, but here's how the math goes. I checked with some math scholars and this is what they tell me, a negative times a negative equals a positive. When a negative judgment is rendered by a negative source, we may take that as positive judgment, right? The logic sounds counter intuitive, but it is true. Beloved, we're known not just by the friends we keep, we're also known by the enemies who oppose us.

Turn over to Matthew 12 for a moment. Matthew 12:22, we read about Jesus delivering a poor man from demon oppression and then there's a judgment that follows, from the Pharisees which is absolutely ridiculous and astounding. Look at Matthew 12:22, it says then "a demon oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him." This is a picture of *pathos* here, pity, it's terrible, it's pathetic. It says there in verse 22 that Jesus healed him so the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, rightly so, and they said "can this be the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said it is only by

Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." Ludicrous. "Knowing their thoughts," verse 25, "Jesus said to them every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste. And no city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he's divided against himself, how then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, well then whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God," and it is, "that I cast out demons then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

We don't have time to go in to how masterfully Jesus demonstrated the ridiculous nature of the Pharisees' criticism and judgment. But, notice here in this section what else we learn about Jesus' detractors. What does the Pharisees judgment tell us not about Jesus, but about the Pharisees. What is the true nature and source of their opposition to Jesus' ministry? Jesus does not leave us guessing on this point. Look at verse 33. "Either make the tree good and its fruit good or make the tree bad and its fruit bad for the tree is known by its fruit." Stop there for just a second. I mean what came out of the Pharisee in the face of Jesus healing and setting someone free; Opening the man's mouth, opening his eyes, sending the demon

away, that is a good thing. They judged it as coming from Satan, bad fruit from a bad tree. Look at verse 34, "You brood of vipers. How can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

Look we're condemned and persecuted by those who by nature are evil. Their judgment should never cause us to waver. Never cause us to doubt. Their judgment, their words should never cause us to become unsettled, unstable, worried, anxious. Rather their distorted perverted sense of justice and righteousness all their judgment should hearten us. They are getting it all wrong. And their judgment says something about us. Persecution for our allegiance to Christ. Persecution for our pursuit of Christ. That should assure us, because of their ill judgment, their ill favor, we are on the right track.

Look back at Luke 6:22, "When evil men spurn your name as evil on the account of the Son of Man." This is an affirmation the true nature of our allegiance is becoming apparent to the enemy, to a wicked world. We are smoking them out. We belong to the Son of Man. We stand for him. Our character is known, yes,

by our friends. But even more poignantly by our enemies, as well; by their hostility, by their opposition.

Okay, so that is three reasons. Let's get to a fourth reason to rejoice in the face of hostility in persecution. Rejoice, number four: Because you are on the right side of history. Rejoice because you are on the right side of history. From a worldly perspective, having a joyful reaction to public ostracizing that would seem to be proof positive to others of our insanity, right? To rejoice when people hate you, that seems to be what would make you certifiable crazy, because it is so completely opposite of how quote, unquote, "normal" people would be expecting to be reacting in the same situation. No one wants to be hated, rejected, ostracized. In fact, we don't like it that much either.

For most of the world, verse 26, they seek the favor of all people. They are people pleasers by nature. They are yes men. They rejoice when all people speak well of them. It is not natural to rejoice when people hate you. That said, we can see examples. Even worldly human examples in the history of the unbelieving world. That even among them, they understand that

there are some causes worth being hated for.

Some have even suffered mistreatment or injury from their contemporaries for taking such stands in their own time. But time has vindicated their moral judgment. The moral courage of those people is now recognized. We make movies about them. Write books about them. Tell stories, up hold them as models. Even though in their own day they were despised. That is just the unbelieving world.

Don't look for that kind of appreciation from the world for standing for the cause of Christ. To be hated by them for the cause of Christ, to stand firm on his side, to be mistreated on the account of the Son of Man; the worth of that cause is not going to be known in this time. Except by those that have been born again. Except by those who are holy. Except by those who see the world now through heavenly eyes.

That's something that the unregenerate world is utterly unable to do and frankly, at times, it is something we even struggle to do, don't we? Listen, folks this is why eschatology matters; the doctrine of last things. We need to go to the



conclusion of the story, over, and over, and over, again, to remind ourselves how this all ends. In the end, the whole world is going to see the truth. Some to eternal rejoicing, some though to eternal lamenting.

Matthew 25:31 and following says, this, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory." Okay, just stopping there, boy that is going to be quite a day isn't it? "When the Son of Man comes in his glory." Wow, this church and all faithful churches are going to be, we're going to shout out the entire world with our joy. We're going to sing, we're going to rejoice. Think about the rest of the world. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him. Then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He'll place the sheep on his right but the goats on his left. And then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come you who are blessed by my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

Then Jesus goes on to describe the character of those who are in that kingdom, now look at verse 41. "He will say to those

on his left, 'Depart from me you cursed. Into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Look at verse 46 as well. These, those who are the cursed, those on his left, the goats, "These," verse 46, "will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous into eternal life."

Listen folks, it's those who enter eternal life who are on the right side of history. I hear a lot of talk about that these days, don't you, hey you want to be on the right side of history on this issue; better get on board, better vote the right way, better get the right candidate, vote for the right legislation, take this stance, sign this petition, because you want to be on the right side of history. Look, none of that matters on this day. What matters is are you oriented rightly to the Son of Man.

Those who enter into eternal punishment, no matter what social positions and causes they supported or opposed in this life. No matter who or what they identified with. If they enter into eternal punishment, we can say, without fear of contradiction, oh, they were on the wrong side of history. Sobering thought.

So we rejoice in persecution because it demonstrates we're

the blessed of Christ, we're resembling Christ, we're therefore condemned by the enemies of Christ, which means we're favorably situated. Standing with Christ on the right side of history. As it says there in Matthew 25:34, then the king is going to say to us, those on his right, "Come, come you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." That's reason for rejoicing is it not?